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### **Abstract**

This article reconstructs the pre-manuscript history of the *Sibylla Tiburtina*, a late antique prophetic text, very widespread after c.1000. It argues against the prevailing belief that a single intelligence structured the Latin text to a single meaning in the eleventh century. By identifying early medieval interpolations this article offers a new account of the work's textual development in the centuries before 1000. This suggests the text known as the Ottonian Sibyl had a far less distinct moment of creation than is usually assumed and was actually the product of interpolators independently adding to its late antique core over a long period and without a common purpose.

## **MANY HANDS WITHOUT DESIGN: THE EVOLUTION OF A MEDIEVAL PROPHETIC TEXT Anke Holdenried**

The Latin prophecy known today as *Sibylla Tiburtina* has always attracted specialists interested in the text's long-drawn out evolution.<sup>1</sup> A broader constituency of scholars has also sought to quarry the text in the context of other historical discussions, such as medieval apocalypticism, imperial ideology, or the mechanisms of medieval political discourse.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, of course, such broader historical contextualisation of the *Tiburtina* depends on what we know about how the prophecy came into existence, a complex process in need of further examination.

This paper considers the history of the text before 1047, the date of its earliest surviving manuscript.<sup>3</sup> This early textual history can only be reconstructed from internal evidence and has been the subject of much previous discussion. The extant manuscripts preserve at least four different versions of the *Sibylla Tiburtina*, all of which already existed by the early twelfth century.<sup>4</sup> It is currently believed that these extant versions derive from a

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<sup>1</sup> Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*; Alexander, *Oracle*; McGinn, 'Oracular Transformations'; Potestà, 'Vaticinium'.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Coote, *Prophecy*, pp.44–49; also Holdenried, *Sibyl*, pp.15–17, with bibliographical references pertaining primarily to the twelfth century; for the earlier Ottonian period, see Fried, 'Endzeiterwartungen', p.431, Gabriele, 'Otto III', 114–16 and Gabriele, *Empire*, p.109.

<sup>3</sup> The prophecy's substantial extant manuscript tradition and reception by its medieval audience have received detailed attention elsewhere, see Holdenried, *Sibyl*.

<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, these extant three versions are: version II (Sackur's text); version III (the 'Cumaeen Sibyl', see Holdenried, *Sibyl*, p. 5 [not to be confused with Bruno of Querfurt's Cumaeen Sibyl, below, n. 62]); version IV (see Holdenried, *Sibyl*, p. 5). In addition, there is a strong case for the Bedan/ms-Bedan recension as a further fourth version, see Holdenried, *Sibyl*, p. 30.

hypothetical source dated c.1000 and known by convention as the ‘Ottonian Sibyl’.<sup>5</sup> No surviving manuscript contains the Ottonian Sibyl which can only be reconstructed from common features of the surviving versions of the *Sybilla Tiburtina*.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, even the Ottonian Sibyl is not the origin of the *Sybilla Tiburtina* itself. That must be sought in a now-lost late antique Greek work.<sup>7</sup> Historiography about the text’s pre-manuscript history has thus tended to concentrate on the question of how the extant Latin textual tradition relates to the *Tiburtina*’s Greek sources.

Below I give a more detailed consideration of the *Tiburtina*’s creation and content. In order to do this I discuss how different scholars have conjectured when, why, in what form, and by what mechanisms of transmission the *Sybilla Tiburtina* evolved into the hypothetical ancestor of the Latin versions preserved in surviving manuscripts. I will explore a variety of arguments about the text’s pre-manuscript history. Even where the nature of the surviving evidence prohibits absolutely definitive conclusions, this discussion will show that certain assumptions about the text’s early history cannot be taken for granted. I shall offer some alternative interpretations which provide more satisfactory explanations for all elements of the text and so will open up new avenues for understanding the very character of the *Sybilla Tiburtina*. In order to appreciate these arguments, readers need to understand the history of the text and the historiography of its textual development. Both are briefly sketched below.

### *The Theodosian Sibyl and the Problem of Textual Accrual*

The Latin *Tiburtina* was edited and published by Ernst Sackur in 1898.<sup>8</sup> It is essentially the amended Latin translation of a fourth-century Greek prophecy, sometimes known to scholars as the Theodosian Sibyl.<sup>9</sup> It has been argued that this Greek prophetic text was written in response to the catastrophic defeat of the Roman Empire by Gothic forces at the battle of Adrianople in 378. This Greek original does not survive; its existence is hypothesized from internal evidence in the Latin manuscript tradition of *Tiburtina*. The exact date when this Greek original reached the West and was translated into Latin is unknown. The earliest surviving manuscript of the Latin *Tiburtina*, however, dates from 1047.<sup>10</sup> For a long time modern scholars assumed that the Greek original was translated into Latin at an early date,

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<sup>5</sup> See Holdenried, *Sibyl*, p. 4; Note that the term ‘Ottonian Sibyl’ is simply an editorial convenience and does not describe provenance: for example, for McGinn (‘Oracular’, p. 613) it is shorthand for ‘a lost Latin translation made in the time of the Emperor Otto III (996–1002)’; Alexander (‘Diffusion’, p. 56) simply spoke of ‘an interpolated edition [...] of the end of the tenth or beginning of the eleventh century’, without using the term ‘Ottonian Sibyl’. Other names for this hypothetical version of the *Tiburtina* are ‘version I’ (McGinn, ‘Oracular’) and ‘wb’ (see Alexander, *Oracle*).

<sup>6</sup> As Bernard McGinn observed, ‘it is difficult to give an immediate preference to any single surviving text as representing a more archaic version’, see ‘Oracular’, p. 618; for comments on the (hypothetical) content of the Ottonian Sibyl, see Alexander, *Oracle*, pp. 48–65 and pp.136–43.

<sup>7</sup> See Alexander, *Oracle*.

<sup>8</sup> Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*.

<sup>9</sup> See McGinn, ‘Oracular’, p. 612 and Alexander, *Oracle*, p. 136, for a reconstruction of its content. Just like the term ‘Ottonian Sibyl’, so the term ‘Theodosian Sibyl’ does not imply that the original text had any relationship with the Roman late imperial court.

<sup>10</sup> This is MS Escorial &.I.3, see Holdenried, *Sibyl*, p. 182 and Holdenried, ‘Christian Moral Decline’.

perhaps even as early as the end of the fourth century. However, no such early Latin text survives nor indeed, at this point, is there any evidence of one.<sup>11</sup>

The text in its surviving form seems to be comprised of three main sub-sections: firstly, an ancient core prophecy, which I shall refer to as the Nine Suns Prophecy; secondly, a prophecy about the Last Emperor, which scholars sometimes call the *Vaticinium of Constans*; and lastly, a regnal list. These are the three longest sections but the text has other more minor elements which I shall also discuss below.

Readers may find it helpful to have some idea of the content of these sections. In the Nine Suns Prophecy, one hundred Roman senators simultaneously have the same dream of nine suns. The Sibyl interprets this as an ultimately pessimistic message since the suns prefigure the nine symbolic generations of mankind, whose condition will decline steadily over the course of history.<sup>12</sup>

The *Vaticinium* (or Last Emperor prophecy) predicts that at the end of time, a Roman emperor (termed variously ‘rex Grecorum’, ‘rex romanorum’ and ‘rex Romanorum et Grecorum’ in the text) will decisively defeat a hostile army and then surrender to God his imperial office and the Christian kingdom (the text refers to the ‘regnum christianorum’).<sup>13</sup> This has been understood to express the notion that by defeating Christianity’s enemies, the Roman Empire would fulfil its function and could be dissolved.<sup>14</sup> This prediction presents the Last Roman emperor as an essentially messianic saviour figure.

The regnal list sets out in chronological order the rulers of Italy and Germany from the sixth century Lombard kings to the eleventh century German emperors, concluding with the Salian ruler Conrad II (1024–39) in the earliest version of the text edited by Sackur (version II). This does involve some interpretation since the list does not give the rulers’ full names, only the initial letter of their name (thus Lombard king A, Lombard king B, emperor K etc.).<sup>15</sup> Importantly, short interpolations are woven into the regnal list, which describe the characteristics or activities of some of these rulers. These interpolations can sometimes be identified as references to real events.

How do these sections fit together? The evidence provided by another surviving late antique Greek prophetic text, the sixth-century *Oracle of Baalbek*, suggests the *Vaticinium* was not part of the original Greek text but was added to the core Nine Suns Prophecy at a later date. The *Oracle* is a modified version of the Theodosian Sibyl but it was never translated into Latin during the Middle Ages nor was it known in the West, as far as we are aware.<sup>16</sup> All versions of the Latin *Tiburtina* reflect a seven-stage scenario of the end of the world and include an account of the Last Emperor (the *Vaticinium of Constans*, referred to above).<sup>17</sup> Neither of these elements appears in extant manuscripts of the *Oracle of Baalbek*. This suggests, amongst other things, that the original fourth-century Greek text did not include these elements (since otherwise they would be in the *Oracle* too). These elements therefore must have been incorporated into the

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<sup>11</sup> See McGinn, ‘Oracular’, p. 613.

<sup>12</sup> See Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, pp. 137–145; Alexander, ‘Diffusion’, pp. 56–57.

<sup>13</sup> Potestà, ‘*Vaticinium*’ and Möhring, *Weltkaiser*, pp. 39–49.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander, ‘Diffusion’, p. 58; see also Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, pp. 151–52.

<sup>15</sup> See Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, pp. 130–37; Alexander, ‘Oracle’, pp. 60–65; McGinn, ‘Oracular’, pp. 622–28.

<sup>16</sup> See also below, n. 37.

<sup>17</sup> On Pseudo-Ephrem, the earliest witness of this seven-stage scenario, see McGinn, ‘Oracular’, p. 608. The Last Emperor motif is prominent in the seventh-century Greek apocalyptic narrative known as Pseudo-Methodius, see Ubierna, ‘Pseudo-Methodius (Greek)’, pp. 245–48.

*Tiburtina* some time *after* the *Oracle* was produced, i.e. after, say, c. 700, but we cannot say with certainty when these elements were added, nor if they were added at the same time. While the relationship of the Nine Suns Prophecy with the *Vaticinium* remains only a matter of probability, we can state with certainty, however, that the regnal list must be an addition or updating added after the Greek original was created. This is because the list refers to rulers from long after the Roman Empire had fallen. Moreover, we also know the text was not static: the regnal lists include interpolations that refer to individuals and events later than the seventh century.

Thus in summary, the probable narrative of the text's early history is currently understood as follows: the Greek original was produced in late antiquity; at some point after the sixth-century (when the *Oracle of Baalbek* was written) the *Vaticinium* and the seven-stage scenario of the end of the world were incorporated into it (but possibly at different times); the amended Greek text was translated into Latin; the regnal list was added; and finally around 1000AD, it assumed its penultimate form as the so-called Ottonian Sibyl. This was then disseminated in the Latin West and in revised forms became the surviving versions identified by modern scholarship.<sup>18</sup> To reiterate, it is not known when several of these steps took place or in what order they occurred – for example, conceivably the *Vaticinium* was part of the original or was only added after the text was translated into Latin.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Editorial Principles and Current Understanding of the Text's Development down to c.1000*

It is now necessary to understand how this account of the text's history resulted from the application of modern editorial principles. For our purposes, two such principles have dictated analysis of the Latin *Tiburtina*. Firstly, editors assume that, unless there is evidence to the contrary, any chronologically specific reference was probably written close to the time described. This assumption utilizes the technique of *vaticinium ex eventu*, whereby prophetic texts recast as prophecy real events which have already occurred. On this basis it is assumed, for example, that a reference to Otto III implies that that part of the text was written c.1000.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, editorial logic favours simplicity. Editors want to assume the minimum number of steps necessary to explain all aspects of the text.

We can see this second principle clearly in Ernst Sackur's work. He tried to unpick the fourth-century core from the medieval text preserved in the earliest manuscript from 1047. He was well aware that he was unravelling roughly five centuries of textual history, a time span providing ample opportunity for the deposition of different layers of amendments. Nonetheless, he was very sparing in identifying medieval passages. As a result, he produced a relatively simple model of the *Tiburtina*'s textual development: first, the original late antique *Tiburtina* was created (which he believed included both the Nine Suns Prophecy and the *Vaticinium*); then the king list was added to this core by a scribe interested in Conrad II (d.1039), whom Sackur regarded as the latest historically identifiable ruler.<sup>21</sup> This enabled

<sup>18</sup> See above, n. 4.

<sup>19</sup> The question of the origins of the *Vaticinium of Constans* is far from settled, see Potestà, 'Vaticinium' and Möhring, *Weltkaiser*, pp. 39–53.

<sup>20</sup> Scholars have therefore used the references to rulers after the Ottonians to date the final form of the text, see, for example, Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, p. 132, McGinn, 'Oracular', p. 621 and p. 635.

<sup>21</sup> Sackur's text in *Sibyllinische Texte* (pp. 177–87), uses different fonts for ancient text (normal type), and medieval interpolations (italics). To avoid confusion, it must be noted that when Sackur speaks of 'many changes' (*mannigfache Veränderungen*, p. 129) and 'different phases' (*verschiedene Phasen*, p. 129) in the *Tiburtina*'s textual development he merely

Sackur to conclude that the *Tiburtina's* medieval form was finalized by a single editor in the time of Conrad II.<sup>22</sup> This belief in a single early eleventh-century redactor often endures, hidden inside more modern interpretations.

Sackur's approach was perfectly reasonable given the state of knowledge at the time. However, since 1898 scholars have made two major discoveries: firstly, the evidence of the Oracle of Baalbek (which Sackur did not know) suggests that the *Vaticinium* and the Nine Suns Prophecy were originally separate; secondly, it seems the king list was not one list, but two. The first list begins with sixth-century Lombard rulers and ends with Otto III (d.1002);<sup>23</sup> the second comments on various post-Ottonian Lombard and Germanic rulers (e.g. Henry II, 1002–1024).<sup>24</sup> These discoveries contradict aspects of Sackur's reconstruction of the text's development which therefore requires revision. Since this reconstruction is based on certain assumptions, these discoveries in turn casts doubt on those assumptions, some of which have survived in the modern historiography. At the same time, however, although our knowledge has moved on, the editorial principles Sackur used remain valid but they must be applied rigorously to the new information we now have about the text. I do this below and a very different picture of the *Tiburtina's* development emerges.

Established ideas about the *Tiburtina's* textual development have not been fundamentally altered by the current view that not one, but two king lists were inserted in the text: it is still assumed that rulers' initials were inserted in chronological sequence and that the second regnal list starts where the first one left off.<sup>25</sup> In this context, Möhring has made an important observation, although even he does not seem to truly appreciate its significance for the *Tiburtina's* textual development. He notes that one of the interpolations in the first king list refers to the capture of Bari and Taranto.<sup>26</sup> Möhring suggests this reference relates to the capture of Bari by Arabs in 840.<sup>27</sup> He also suggests (entirely logically and in accord with principle of *vaticinium ex eventu* described earlier), that this reference was contemporary with the events in question and therefore of ninth-century date.<sup>28</sup> To me, this seems to imply that the references concerning Bari and Taranto were added to the *Tiburtina* in the ninth

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thinks of alterations made in the king list after its first insertion and once it had become part of the narrative, that is, alterations made from around the mid-eleventh century onwards, see p. 132.

<sup>22</sup> Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, p. 137: 'Der langobardische Sibyllist hat also bei der Herstellung seiner Redaktion entweder eine ältere Sibyllinische Herrscherliste verwendet, die er dann wieder ausspann, oder hat sie selbst erfunden, was keineswegs ausgeschlossen ist.'

<sup>23</sup> See Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, pp. 130–31 and McGinn, 'Oracular', p. 624.

<sup>24</sup> McGinn, 'Oracular', p. 626.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. McGinn, 'Oracular', pp. 624–26. The new view merely concedes that the two regnal lists were 'inserted at different times and without excessive attention to the literary coherence on the whole', see Potestà, '*Vaticinium*', p. 274; his reference to the lack of literary coherence refers to the fact the second post-Ottonian list of rulers ends with a series of the initial B, that is, with the same initial that in the first interpolated list is read as a reference to the earlier sixth-century Lombard (Berengars)).

<sup>26</sup> Here Möhring intends the lines: Tunc exsurget rex Salicus E nomine et expugnabit Langobardos et erit prelia et pugne. Ipse autem rex Salicus erit fortis et potens et paucis temporibus erit regnum eius. Tunc exurgent Agareni et tyranny et captivabunt Tarentum et Barro et multas civitates depredabunt, see Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, p. 183.

<sup>27</sup> Contra Alexander who suggests events contemporary with a late eleventh-century redactor working in the time of Henry IV and referring to the Normans, see Möhring, *Weltkaiser*, p. 34.

<sup>28</sup> Möhring, *Weltkaiser*, p. 34.

century. Möhring however, never considers this possibility. Instead he continues to assume that the text was assembled by a single ill-informed eleventh-century redactor in the time of Conrad II (1024–1039).<sup>29</sup> Perhaps this is because Möhring is primarily interested in the version preserved in the oldest manuscript (known as version II), or perhaps because he feels it necessary to retain the belief in a single eleventh-century scribe in order to explain other aspects of the text, particularly the fact that, elsewhere, the lengths of the reigns of the Ottonian Emperors are ‘factually incorrect’.<sup>30</sup>

To reconcile the idea of an eleventh-century composition with his observations about the reference to the conquest of Bari and Taranto, Möhring hypothesizes that the eleventh-century editor used a prophetic text of Carolingian date.<sup>31</sup> However there is no actual evidence for any such text. Möhring merely infers its existence from a few lines in the *Sybilla Tiburtina*. In my view, he does this because he cannot escape the idea of an eleventh-century compiler. This raises many difficulties. He must now explain the merger of even more elements: the Nine Suns Prophecy, the *Vaticinium*, two king lists, the Ottonian interpolations and, now, a hypothetical Carolingian prophecy as well. If correct, this would complicate the text's early medieval history even more. Although I find Möhring's identification of a ninth-century reference convincing (and below I retain it), I see no need to hypothesize a ninth-century prophetic text. In my view, and in accordance with the second editorial principle described above, there are simpler explanations for the evidence than he proposes. To reach them, we must abandon the idea that the *Tiburtina* is the product of a single editor c.1000.

### *Sedimentation of the Text*

Möhring considers only the Carolingian material. I have, perhaps, identified another example which casts even more light on the text's development. In the extant texts of version II, after the interpolation concerning Otto III, there is a reference to a Lombard king ‘A’ which brackets a reference to the Pentapolis.<sup>32</sup> Hitherto, on the basis of traditional editorial logic, scholars have assumed that the *Tiburtina*'s regnal list was produced at one moment in time by a scribe who intended to produce a sequence of rulers in chronological order. Consequently king ‘A’ has traditionally been identified as Arduin of Ivrea (reigned 1002–1014), who

<sup>29</sup> Möhring, *Weltkaiser*, pp. 32–33, and p. 38.

<sup>30</sup> See Möhring, *Weltkaiser*, p. 35. The *Tiburtina* allows seven years for the ten-year reign of Otto II (973–83) and four (sometimes five) years for the eight-year reign of Otto III (994–1002), see n. 39 below. However, these supposed ‘errors’ might, for example, merely reflect a contemporary scribe writing in these years, or might indicate that a scribe relied on charters written in the seventh year of Otto II's reign and the fifth year of Otto III's.

<sup>31</sup> Möhring, *Weltkaiser*, p. 35: ‘die auf die Karolinger bezogene Vorlage der mittelalterlichen Tiburtina’ and ‘Es ist also möglich, dass die Quellen der mittelalterlichen Tiburtina, was die Darstellungen der Zeit des Mittelalters betrifft, grösstenteils oder sogar ausschliesslich andere Weissagungen sind’.

<sup>32</sup> *Et post cum surget rex A nomine, et in diebus eius erunt pugne multe* [inter] Agarenos et Grecos. Inter paganos namque multa proelia et pugne erunt. Syriam expugnabunt et Pentapolim captivabunt. *Ipse rex erit ex genere Langobardorum* [italics those of Sackur], Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, p. 183. On version III and version IV texts, McGinn, ‘Oracular’, pp. 625–28 and p. 641. Note that although king ‘A’ is not included in McGinn's one-manuscript edition of version IV, king ‘A’ does appear in the regnal lists in some other manuscripts of version IV: e.g. in MS Breslau R.436, fols 143<sup>r</sup>–146<sup>v</sup> (s. XIIin) and MS Vat. Reg. Lat. 2080, fols 164<sup>r</sup>–166<sup>v</sup> (s. XII).

became King of Italy after Otto III's death.<sup>33</sup> However there is a problem with this identification. It is difficult to see why any scribe would have thought Arduin (or any other eleventh-century Italian or German ruler whose name began with 'A') had a special connection to the Pentapolis or that any events of special significance occurred there during that time. The text here makes no sense.

The term Pentapolis has been used of various places at various times. Interestingly, it was used in the seventh and eighth centuries to describe an area controlled by Byzantium on the Adriatic coast of Italy. This Pentapolis *was* connected to a Lombard king whose name starts with the letter 'A' – Aistulf (749–756), who briefly conquered it in the 750s. Contemporary eighth-century sources referred to his attacks on the Pentapolis.<sup>34</sup> I suggest that Aistulf is the Lombard king 'A' referred to in the text. If this hypothesis is correct, the principle of *vaticinium ex eventu* would mean that this should be understood as a fairly small eighth-century insertion, perhaps even the first interpolation into the Latin *Tiburtina*. It could be objected that the term Pentapolis may have already appeared in the fourth-century text, as Sackur believed. That may be so, but the name Pentapolis would have had renewed topical resonance in mid eighth-century Italy, particularly if misinterpreted to refer to the Italian Pentapolis rather than the Greek, Syrian or Egyptian ones. Indeed, the appearance of the word Pentapolis in the late antique text might have actually prompted the interpolation about Lombard king 'A'.

However, there is one major problem with interpreting the reference to 'A' in the king list as a reference to an eighth-century figure: it *follows* a reference to Otto III and so would be out of chronological sequence in the regnal list. That is of course only a difficulty if we insist on sticking to the traditional editorial approach which assumes the whole text was created c.1000 with a single purpose. If my explanation of king 'A' and my revised interpretation of Möhring's ninth-century interpolation are accepted, we now have two early medieval interpolations in the text. The principle of *vaticinium ex eventu* suggests that one would have been added in the mid-eighth century and one in the mid-ninth century. This would suggest that the *Tiburtina* had at least some kind of early medieval existence. It also means that the text cannot be the product of a single eleventh-century compiler. How then should we imagine the text developed if not in the hands of a single Salian scribe? I suggest a quite different process, which I would call sedimentation, by which I mean that comments – like those about 'A' and Bari – were gradually deposited within the medieval segment of the *Tiburtina* over a long period of time and generally as they occurred, rather than being the result of a single scribal intervention. The problem of king 'A' being out of chronological sequence then disappears if we imagine the gradual accumulation of later interpolations, perhaps inserted by different scribes at different times. Indeed, the reference to 'A' would have been in the right place chronologically at the time it was first inserted, in the middle of the eighth century; subsequent interpolations inserted out of sequence now make it appear as if 'A' is in the wrong place but that is only because of the way the text developed later. The text is certainly

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<sup>33</sup> E.g. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, p. 133; Alexander, *Oracle*, p. 62, n. 35; McGinn, 'Oracular', p. 626.

<sup>34</sup> See, *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. by Louis Duchesne, Tom. 1 (Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1886), p. 453 [Life XCIII (Stephanus II, 752–757), Chapter XLVII]: Praenominatus autem Fulradus, [...] Ravennantium partes cum missis iamfati Aistulfi Regis coniungens et per singulas ingrediens civitates, tam Pentapoleos et Emiliae, easque recipiens et obsides per unamquamque auferens atque primates secum una claves portarum civitatum deferens, Romam coniunxit. I am grateful to G. V. B. West for drawing my attention to Aistulf and the *Liber Pontificalis* (see also below, n. 56).



capable of supporting this hypothesis. This conclusion has important implications for the creation and dissemination of the text.

### *The Ottonian Material as Further Sediment*

The comments above have discussed the development of the Latin *Tiburtina* in general terms. I now turn to the Ottonian material which has been so important to previous scholars trying to date the text. Current discussions of the *Tiburtina*'s emergence in the West focus c.1000, when Otto II and his son Otto III reigned as emperors. This is for two reasons: firstly, because it seems the text only begins to be disseminated in the Latin West after the millennium – there are no earlier traces of it; secondly, because, although differing in other ways, all the surviving Latin versions of the *Tiburtina* nevertheless contain an almost identical set of comments concerning the three Ottonian emperors. Since the standard editorial approach to prophetic texts is to date their creation to the time of the last historically identifiable event or ruler, the current editorial assumption is that the ancestor of the different extant Latin versions must be placed sometime between the death of Otto II (983) and that of Otto III (1002).<sup>35</sup>

Initially this dating was merely dictated by editorial logic of the kind described above. Historians then supported this assumption by observing that the Ottonians also had particular links with Byzantine culture because the Western Emperor Otto II married the Byzantine princess Theophanu (c.960–991).<sup>36</sup> This seemed to fit the text because the Latin *Tiburtina* is in origin a fourth-century Greek prophecy. This Byzantine-Ottonian combination appeared to supply a plausible conduit for transmission from the East, a context for the translation of the text from Greek into Latin and for its dissemination in Latin Christendom.<sup>37</sup> Superficially the Ottonian court (understood here as the ruler's circle, including the imperial family itself as well as faithful followers) seemed the perfect setting for the construction of the first Latin *Tiburtina*.<sup>38</sup> Although not explicit in the historiography described above, this also seemed to fit with the editorial idea that the text must be the result of a single impulse, a single intelligence structuring the text to a single meaning.

The sedimentation theory I have proposed contradicts this view. However, even leaving aside the implications of the sedimentation theory for a moment, there is another even more major problem with an interpretation associating the text with the Ottonian court: the comments on Otto III are not courtly flattery. They are hostile:

et ex ipsa muliere nascetur rex per O nomine. Hic erit sanguinarius et facinorosus et sine fide et veritate, et per ipsum multa erit malitia et multa sanguinis effusio atque destructe erunt ecclesie in ipsius potestate. [From this woman a king will be born, O[tto III] by name. And he will be bloody and villainous, faithless and without

<sup>35</sup> See Alexander, *Oracle*, p. 61, n. 33 and McGinn, 'Oracular', p. 613 and p. 625.

<sup>36</sup> For example, McGinn, 'Oracular', p.613; Similarly, Gabriele, invokes Theophanu as a conduit at least for certain apocalyptic ideas, see 'Otto III', pp. 115–16.

<sup>37</sup> It is tempting here to look in particular at a figure like Luidprand of Cremona, who travelled to the Byzantine court at the behest of the Ottonian court in 968. In his account of this embassy Luidprand reports on the Byzantine prophecies of Hippolytus, see Mayr-Harting, 'Luidprand', p. 553, see Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, pp.102–109 and Möhring, *Weltkaiser*, pp. 163–64 and pp.187–88. It is important to note, though, that there is no evidence that Luidprand came into contact with a Greek version of the *Tiburtina*.

<sup>38</sup> Theophanu's role in the transmission of Greek culture is itself much-debated, see Rosamund McKitterick, 'Ottonian Intellectual Culture in the Tenth Century and the Role of Theophanu', *Early Medieval Europe*, 2 (1993), 54–74; Mayr-Harting, 'Luitprand', p. 555.

honesty, and he will cause much malice and much blood will be shed and churches will be destroyed in his dominions.]]<sup>39</sup>

Clearly these are not comments from an admirer. It seems unlikely a text expressing such hostility to Otto III would have been popular in court circles. This negativity has received far too little attention, indeed, usually it has been either ignored or dismissed.<sup>40</sup> Even where these comments have been taken at face value, they have been seen as further confirmation of the hypothesis that an eleventh-century scribe was at work (probably in the reign of Conrad II) rather than a contemporary tenth-century redactor.<sup>41</sup> It is believed only a later scribe would have expressed such negativity about Otto III.<sup>42</sup>

Scholars have had difficulty reconciling these negative comments with their interpretation of the text. This was because, following Sackur,<sup>43</sup> the assumption has remained embedded in the historiography that the insertion of the regnal list was a response to the final section of the text, the *Vaticinium of Constans*, and was intended to link a contemporary ruler with the events in the *Vaticinium*. Sackur believed this occurred in the time of Conrad II in an attempt write Conrad into the Christian end-time scenario. Implicitly, this ‘imperial’ reading privileges the *Vaticinium* over other parts of the text.

However, we are not certain that this *was* the context for these comments about Otto III. It is often assumed either that c. 1000 the *Vaticinium of Constans* was already part of the text or that adding the *Vaticinium* to the Nine Suns Prophecy was the chief motivation for the scribe who wrote the lines about the Ottonians. However, as noted above, strictly, we do not know when the *Vaticinium* and the Nine Suns Prophecy were brought together. It is possible that when the hostile comments about Otto III were written, the *Sybilla Tiburtina* had not yet been assembled in the form we now know. That would put the comments in a different context and not necessarily an ‘imperial’ one. Even if the *Vaticinium* was part of the *Tiburtina* at the relevant time, however, there is still no need to dismiss the anti-Ottonian comments as an error or inconsistency. The ‘imperial’ interpretation assumes that the ultimately messianic

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<sup>39</sup> The translation is my own. The reference to Otto III (see [c] below) concludes an interpolation that refers to all three of the Ottonian emperors: [a] Et in diebus illis procedet rex per O nomine et erit potentissimus et fortis et bonus et faciet iusticiam pauperibus et recte iudicabit. [b] Et de ipso O procedet alius O potentissimus et erunt sub eo pugne inter paganos et christianos et sanguis Grecorum fundetur et cor eius in manu Dei et regnabit annos VII [c] et ex ipsa muliere nascetur rex [... see quote above ...] in ipsius potestate. In aliis namque regionibus tribulationes erunt multe et prelia. Tunc surget gens adversus gentem in Cappadociam et Pamphiliam capitivabunt in ipsius tempore, eo, quod non introieret per ostium in ovile [ovium]. Hic namque rex regnabit annos IIIIor, see Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, p. 182 and, for version IV, McGinn, ‘Oracular’, p. 641. We cannot state with certainty whether [a], [b], and [c] were added by the same or different scribes, nor how many scribes were involved.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Möhring, *Weltkaiser*, cited above in notes 29–30. Sackur assumed the reference to the destruction of churches in the Ottonian interpolation was a remnant of the fourth-century text, see *Sibyllinische Texte*, p. 157.

<sup>41</sup> Möhring, *Weltkaiser*, p. 38 modifies Sackur’s view and assumes a date just prior to Conrad II’s reign (1024–39), that is, in the time of Henry II (d. 1024).

<sup>42</sup> In passing note that if it is correct that the hostile comments about Otto were only added by a later scribe, this would also imply that the so-called ‘Ottonian Sibyl’ (the *Ur-text* of all surviving Latin versions) had not yet crystallised in its final form until after Otto III’s death. Obviously, if that was so, it could not have circulated at the Ottonian court, as is sometimes implied, see, for example, Gabriele, ‘Otto III’, pp. 114–16 and Gabriele, *Empire*, p. 109.

<sup>43</sup> See Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, pp. 155–63.

tone of the *Vaticinium of Constans* was more important to the compiler than the pessimistic outlook of the Nine Suns Prophecy. However, it is perfectly conceivable that whoever added the lines about the Ottonians was either, as just discussed, working solely with the Nine Suns Prophecy or that, at the very least, the Nine Suns segment of the text was more important to him than the *Vaticinium*. This possibility has been ignored.

Once we recognize this, a different perspective emerges. Such negativity would be entirely in keeping with the character of the ancient core narrative of the *Tiburtina*, which, as Paul Alexander has reminded us, is clearly pessimistic: ‘for each succeeding sun [in the Nine Suns Prophecy] the bloody aspect and the darkness intensify until the ninth and last shows no more than a ray of light.’<sup>44</sup> In this context, it would be an entirely appropriate response to the spirit of the narrative to thus talk about rulers of the ninth generation (such as the Ottonians) as ‘the destroyer of churches’.

This would be quite a ‘pure’ textual reaction, untainted by worldly concerns; that is perfectly possible. However, as an alternative interpretation, we can impute less lofty ideals to the scribe. Otto III was not universally liked. Contemporary views of the emperor ranged from admiration to enmity.<sup>45</sup> His personal piety notwithstanding, there were many in monastic and ecclesiastical circles who inevitably felt aggrieved at Otto III.<sup>46</sup> For every winner, there was a disappointed loser. On this basis, there seems no reason why we should not take at face value the hostile comments about Otto, rather than try to explain them away. Indeed, the sedimentation model I have suggested for the *Tiburtina*’s development would explain perfectly how contradictory statements could co-exist in the text. They could have been added by different scribes at different times.

Given this, if the sedimentation theory is correct, there is no need to see the Latin *Tiburtina* as the product of a single scribe or impulse. I have already suggested that there are eighth- and ninth-century interpolations into the text. That means the text was being revised generations before the Ottonians even became emperors. It may be possible in future to identify the chronology of other interpolations. It is perfectly conceivable that in the late tenth century, yet another scribe felt moved to insert comments, this time about the reign of Otto III. We must seriously entertain the possibility that this scribe did so without any plan to create a chronologically coherent story; indeed, not only would the eighth- and ninth-century interpolations have been made by different scribes, even the references to the three Ottonian rulers might be the work of more than one scribe. Hence, if we permit my interpretation of the Lombard king ‘A’ who conquered the Pentapolis, we can rewrite the pre-manuscript history of the text thus: the Greek original was translated into Latin; there was an eighth-century interpolation concerning ‘A’'s conquest of the Pentapolis; a century or more later, there was a ninth-century interpolation concerning the conquest of Bari; and then, c.1000 (an)other interpolation(s) were added about the Ottonians. The simplest explanation for the text’s current form would be that these interpolations (and others) were originally marginal or interlinear glosses which became incorporated into the main body of the text, where they were preserved ever after.

If this is the way the text developed, scribes working at such a remove from each other would not necessarily all be working to the same objective, nor would they necessarily share the same views of their subjects. They certainly wouldn’t be able to consult each other or co-operate. Just like earlier interpolators, the scribe(s) of the Ottonian period simply added comments where they appeared to fit best with the rest of the narrative. Thus the form of the

<sup>44</sup> Alexander, ‘Diffusion’, p. 57

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Althoff, *Otto III*, p. 45.

<sup>46</sup> Görich, *Otto III*, pp. 123–86, offers a detailed analysis of opposition circles (secular, as well as ecclesiastical).

text we have today, or even the form of the Ottonian Sibyl, would not be the result of a consciously conceived and executed project, but simply the accumulation of fragments of information, some accurate, some not, that became fossilized in the text. Note this is also the way we can observe the text developing after 1047 in surviving manuscripts.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, it might even have added to the credibility of a prophetic text like the *Tiburtina* if it was somewhat contradictory and opaque. The characteristics that modern scholars find problematical may have recommended it to medieval readers. The consequence of the interpretation advanced above is that the Ottonian Sibyl would no longer be the product of a single scribe. Indeed, the history of the *Tiburtina* need not be focused around the year 1000 at all. The Latin text could have developed across centuries. The creation of the Ottonian Sibyl might then represent nothing more than the addition of a few lines.

### *Greek Culture in Rome*

If the text is not pro-imperial, then perhaps the ‘Ottonian Sibyl’ should not be linked to a sympathetic Ottonian court circle. But where, then, did it reach its final form and from where was it disseminated? Since no early manuscripts survive we can only extrapolate some of the necessary criteria from internal evidence. The environment would need to have Greek cultural connections, an interest in Italian rulers (Lombard, Carolingian and Ottonian) and to be a suitable springboard for the text’s dissemination. To some scholars, the references in the regnal list to Lombard kings would seem to suggest Lombard Italy, but Greek was a relatively rare accomplishment there.<sup>48</sup> Others have looked to Byzantine or formerly Byzantine territories such as Naples, Calabria or Puglia, yet, ultimately, these would have had little interest in Lombard kings.<sup>49</sup> Although Venice or Ravenna might be possible, the text’s imperial content immediately suggests Rome. Throughout the Early Middle Ages, Rome had probably the densest surviving concentration of Greek culture in the Latin West.<sup>50</sup> Apart from its Classical legacy, travellers, pilgrims and envoys ensured ongoing contact between Rome and the East. Moreover, many educated Greek-speaking Christians fled to Italy in the seventh and eighth centuries. While Rome’s Greek population declined over time, even at the ‘end of the tenth century there were enough Greeks there to form one of the twelve military *scholae* of the city’.<sup>51</sup>

Of special importance, however, were the Greek monastic communities founded in Rome or at least re-populated with new recruits in the wake of the Persian and Arab invasions

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<sup>47</sup> Holdenried, *Sibyl*.

<sup>48</sup> See Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte*, p. 135. Potestà, ‘Vaticinium’, p. 289.

<sup>49</sup> Möhring, *Weltkaiser*, pp. 38–39 suggests a complex scenario. He explains the prominence of initials referring to Lombard rulers in the *Tiburtina* by reference to a hypothetical eleventh-century Byzantine subject from south Italy prepared to support the Lombard elite in their resistance against German rulers. Potestà, ‘Vaticinium’, p. 289, assembles the same elements to suggest ‘an Italian centre...engaged...in...handing down the memory of the kingdom of Italy, in particular its Lombard roots, hostile to Otto III and...intent on kindling...the hope of a revival of Byzantine power in Italy.’ There was no such scribe or centre. Möhring and Potestà each assume the text expresses a single view and so each has constructed a scenario to explain unrelated elements of the text. Möhring and Potestà assume coherence where there was none. Once again the sedimentation theory explains how these mutually incompatible references can be reconciled. The various elements were added by different scribes at different times and not to any single purpose.

<sup>50</sup> Berschin, *Greek Letters*.

<sup>51</sup> See Hamilton, ‘City of Rome’, p. 5.

of the Near East in the seventh century.<sup>52</sup> These institutions were reservoirs of Greek culture which survived into the tenth century, indeed Greek monasticism in Rome underwent something of a revival in the 900s, just as Rome's Latin monasteries were being reformed under St Odo of Cluny in the reign of Alberic (932–954).<sup>53</sup> Elsewhere it has been suggested that one (but not necessarily the only) mechanism for the text's dissemination might have been via the Cluniac network.<sup>54</sup> From the mid-tenth century Cluny was involved, with varying degrees of success, in reforming some of Rome's nearby monasteries, including Montecassino.<sup>55</sup> The latter in turn provides an example of the kind of culturally Lombard institution near Rome and with links to the city that could easily be invoked to account for the interest in Lombard kings referred to in the *Tiburtina*. Indeed, when considering Rome in relation to the Lombards, we can note further that in the middle of the eighth century a 'Lombard' version of the life of pope Stephen II in the *Liber Pontificalis* was produced in Rome, omitting much of the criticism of the Lombard sovereigns, notably including Aistulf.<sup>56</sup> This would tie in with other suggestions about the *Tiburtina*.

Returning to Rome in the tenth-century, we know that Otto III's activities there were highly controversial. This includes, for example, the mutilation of the antipope John Philagathos and the subsequent rituals of his defrocking and humiliation which caused the indignant withdrawal from Rome of St Nilus, a Greek ascetic and highly revered spiritual teacher of his time.<sup>57</sup> Otto's refusal to acknowledge the Donation of Constantine and his determination to live in Rome and to exercise imperial rule over the city were also unpopular. We get a small glimpse of the sense of grievance which contemporary churchmen felt at Otto's disregard for the papacy's apostolic primacy in Rome in Bruno of Querfurt's comment about Otto:

cesar in non recto itinere, cogitans destruere ingentes muros maximae Romae; cuius cives quamvis sibi pro bonis mala fecissent, ipsa Roma tamen a Deo datum apostolorum domicilium erat. [the King took a wrong turn when he thought he could destroy the eternal walls of Rome. For Rome's greatness lies in having been chosen by God as the resting place of His apostles'.]<sup>58</sup>

We see here how Otto's behaviour triggered disapproval.<sup>59</sup> Given this, the *Tiburtina*'s assertion that churches were destroyed in Otto's time seems more comprehensible. Rome is almost too rich in plausible environments for the *Tiburtina*. It will probably never be possible to identify with certainty the compiler of the *Tiburtina*; although if my argument is correct, there is in fact no such individual. In this respect, I finish with an observation.

Strikingly, one of the monasteries which made a major contribution to Greek monasticism in Rome was SS Bonifacio & Alessio. Together with Latin monks it also housed

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<sup>52</sup> Sansterre, *Moines grecs*.

<sup>53</sup> Hamilton, 'City of Rome', pp. 9–14.

<sup>54</sup> Holdenried, 'Christian Moral Decline'.

<sup>55</sup> See Wollasch, 'Monasticism', pp. 178–80.

<sup>56</sup> Davis, *Lives*, pp. xiv, 52.

<sup>57</sup> See Althoff, *Otto III*, pp. 73–74. On Nilus, see Hamilton, 'City of Rome', p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> Bruno of Querfurt, *Vita quinque*, ed. by Kade, p. 722; *Life of the Five Brothers*, transl. by Matus, p. 108. Bruno expressed these views in 1008, some six years after Otto III's death. The specific hagiographical and personal context that frames the expression of these critical sentiments has been rigorously analysed by Görich, *Otto III*, pp. 26–39.

<sup>59</sup> See also above, n.46 and Warner, 'Ideals', pp. 1–18. Besides, in Rome disapproval of Otto combined with a strong republican tradition that resented imperial presence in the city, see Mayr-Harting, 'Luitprand', p. 543.

a Byzantine community, an arrangement which served to assist in missionary work in eastern Europe.<sup>60</sup> Two prominent German missionaries, Adalbert of Prague and Bruno of Querfurt, were residents there during the reign of Otto III.<sup>61</sup> Around 1008 Bruno expressed critical views about Otto III and in his account of Otto III's death, Bruno used a prophecy attributed to the Cumaean Sibyl, a figure which, like our Sibyl, was well known from lists of the ancient Sibyls included in encyclopaedic texts.<sup>62</sup> A German bishop who was critical of Otto III in writing, was resident in a Byzantine community in Rome on the Aventine Hill and showed an interest in Sibylline prophecy would seem a suitable candidate for the kind of person likely to have had input into the *Tiburtina*.<sup>63</sup> This does not mean Bruno created the text – only that someone like him may have contributed to its final form, along with the original translator and at least a couple of anonymous interpolators. It is interesting to speculate what the text might have meant to such a person. If Bruno did read the text, he may have seen things in it quite different from the imperial associations upon which scholars have focused. The text's reference to ancient pagans might well have put him in mind of the pagan Slavs he was about to evangelize.<sup>64</sup>

Finally we may conjecture how the text reached the eleventh-century scribes who disseminated it. The sedimentation theory implies that the text had a very narrow manuscript transmission until the eleventh century. Perhaps we may even imagine a single copy of the late antique work lying mostly neglected in some dark age book collection until, once every generation or two, curious scribes saw that other hands had amended it; thus authorized, they added their own comments here and there, as each saw fit. So the text grew in obscurity, bearing brief witness to the passing of Lombard kings and of emperors, Carolingian, Ottonian and Salian, until sometime in the eleventh century this patchwork piece was copied and all these additions became part of the *Sybilla Tiburtina*. Copied, then, again and again, it spread across Christendom carrying the fossilized additions of long-dead interpolators.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See Hamilton, 'Monastery of S. Alessio', pp. 265–310.

<sup>61</sup> Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp. 207–245.

<sup>62</sup> See above, n. 58. For comments on the Cumaean Sibyl in Bruno's *Vita quinque Fratrum*, see Görich, *Otto III*, pp. 43–44. For Bruno's Sibyl, see Bruno of Querfurt, *Vita quinque*, ed. by Kade, p. 724: Videtur autem in morte eius compleri vaticinium Cymanae Sibillae, quae de Salvatoris adventu, de redemptione et iudicio temporali cum plura vera cecinisset, inter Romana fata, ubi de regibus loquitur, de isto cesare Ottone ita loquitur: rex in purpura natus ante portam civitatis in terra moritur non sua. Quod est simile rei veritatis, quia rebellante terra et clausa civitate mors intonuit imperatoris.

<sup>63</sup> The Latin text of the *Sybilla Tiburtina* has moved the location of the Sibyl's dream interpretation from the Capitoline Hill to the Aventine; previous editors have speculated that this was because from the fourth-century onwards the Greek communities associated with the Aventine had given it a reputation for spiritual purity, see, Alexander, *Oracle*, p. 52. Hitherto the significance of this observation for a tenth-century context has gone unnoticed.

<sup>64</sup> See Hamilton, 'Monastery of S. Alessio', pp. 291–300.

<sup>65</sup> At least 117 surviving manuscripts have been identified so far, see Holdenried, *Sibyl*, pp. 177–97. For manuscript copies which have come to light since 2006, see Holdenried, 'Christian Moral Decline', n.11 and Potestà, 'Vaticinium', n.1.

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